

SKINS

No 1



Skins

ORIGIN
THE LOOK
MUSIC
'AGGRO'
SUEDEHEADS
THE SKINHEAD REVIVAL



ORIGIN

Skinheads originated in London amongst the young working class kids as a reaction against the hippies and the middle-class take over of popular music. It was also a reaction against society. Many kids leaving school found themselves facing only boring jobs in factories to look forward to and limited opportunities. Being a Skinhead was hitting back at Society.

The late '60's had seen a change in music and a gap evolve. Rock and Roll, the music of the young people was becoming University music leaving behind the old Mod audience of the mid '60's. A gulf grew between these and the students and hippies whose symbols of long hair, pacifism and intellectualism were becoming objects of hatred. The Skins image and attitude were in direct opposition to the middle class student drop out.



The cropped hair, turned up Levis, braces and boots became the uniform for the 1969 version of the Mod. A style of clothing which was in stark contrast to 'Hippy Gear'. The cult was to reach its peak in the summer of '69.

THE LOOK

The hairstyle gave the kids their new name 'SKINHEAD' and the steel capped boots the new message 'Aggro'. The braces marked them out as a working class group. The haircut and short trousers and boots were copied from the young black kids who followed the sound systems sprouting up. (White kids who went to the same clubs as W. Indians picked up on their music and were exposed to their style of dress. There was a similarity between the Skins and the Rude boy cult of '67 amongst black kids as regards dress and behaviour though musically different. The haircut came in numbers 1-4. No. 1 being the shortest. The skinheads aim was to look smart and the sharp stylized clothes they wore were worlds apart from the scruffy look of the Hippies.



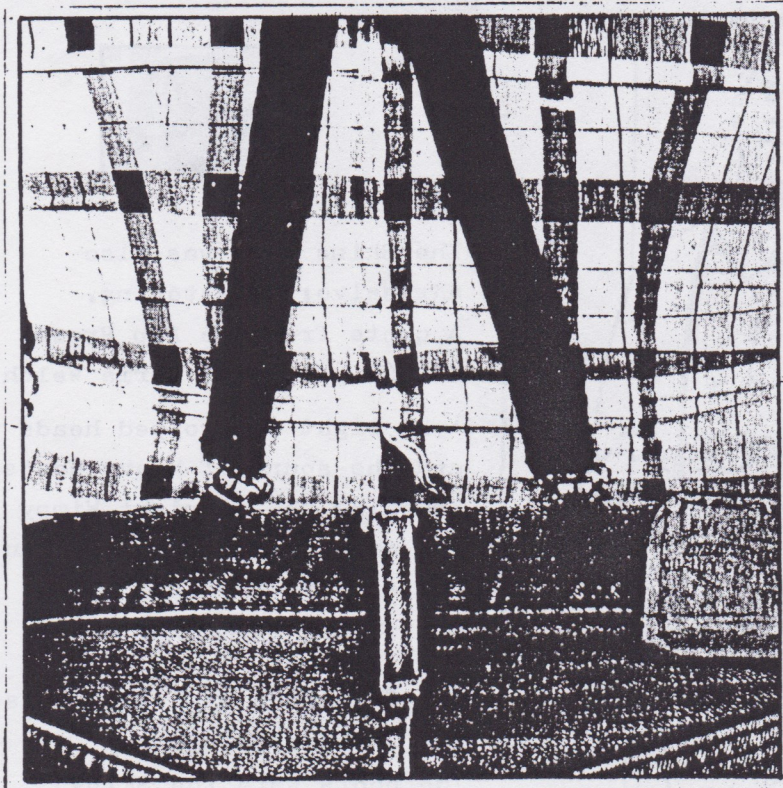
The Skins look was also aggressive; threatening. A quote from the Pop Press of '69 penned by Chris Welch:

'The sight of cropped heads and the sound of heavy boots entering the midnight Wimpy bar or dance hall is the cause for sinking feelings in the pit of the stomach'.

The Skinheads style of dress was threatening.

The boots were the Skins weapon. His haircut meant that he had no hair to be pulled in a fight. The steel combs which many skins carried were obviously not used for their intended purpose but as a weapon to slash. The Skins Uniform was almost compulsory and allowed little room for variation.

At first the Skins wore jeans or army trousers and collarless shirts or 'T' shirts with boots and braces. Later the Skins wore Ben Sherman and Brutus shirts as well as Fred Perry shirts. These shirts like the Levi Sta-pres and red tag jeans the Skins wore had been popular with the Mods. The Skins favoured striped and checked (window pane) shirts made of an American fabric known as OXFORD. This was especially durable weave and the shirts were long lasting. Most of the Skins clothes were quite expensive and emphasis was placed on looking smart certainly not scruffy like the Hippies or Greasers whom the Skins despised.



Whilst the jeans, boots et al were the Skins daytime gear for football etc., they changed into suits and brogues or loafers for nights out at the local Dancehall where people wearing jeans were usually not permitted entrance and most clubs had a 'No boots' rule.

MUSIC

Like the Mods the Skinheads wanted music to dance to but not the dope-orientated mystical music of the Hippy. Dave Hill of Slade.....

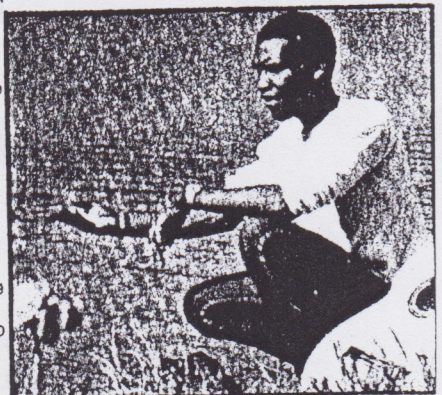
"Skinheads don't move their feet when they dance they stamp them up and down and make one helluva racket. The more noise they make the better....."

The Skins wanted to be noticed and this involved noise, brashness violence and bawdy. Motown was the only Pop that had any appeal to the Skins and The Motown Chartbusters Albums were snapped up by them. But Motown's identity was not defined clearly enough for the Skins. They latched onto Reggae. The updated version of Ska pioneered by the Rastafarians in Jamaica. Ska had enjoyed a brief success with the Mods in '64 but Reggae was to achieve greater success with the Skins due to the growing liason between young whites and W. Indians. Reggae served the Skins purpose as a dance music but it was still distanced from them because it was basically W. Indian music.



SYMARIP

The Skins adoption of Reggae made it an important part of the British Music Scene. Wherebefore it had been 'underground' music Reggae was now being played in white clubs, making the Pop charts and being played on radio and T.V.



**DESMOND
DEKKER**



Skins had been listening to Reggae since '68 but had remained unnoticed as such until '69 when Desmond Dekker's Israelites and the 'Skinhead Moonstomp' appeared in the charts. The 'Skinhead Moonstomp' was by SYMARIP.

The sound was more commercial and the artists successful e.g. Desmond Dekker made No.1. Never before had so many Jamaican records been in the charts and Reggae music enjoyed a deserved boom. For nearly two years the Skinhead trend was to prevail. The Skins altered the musical direction of Reggae. The heavy ethnic records which the West Indians wanted were not heard so often.

Instead Reggae musicians began to turn their attention to the white fans who were responsible for the increased sales of their music. The Reggae Artists realised they could get into the charts with 'Skinhead Music'.

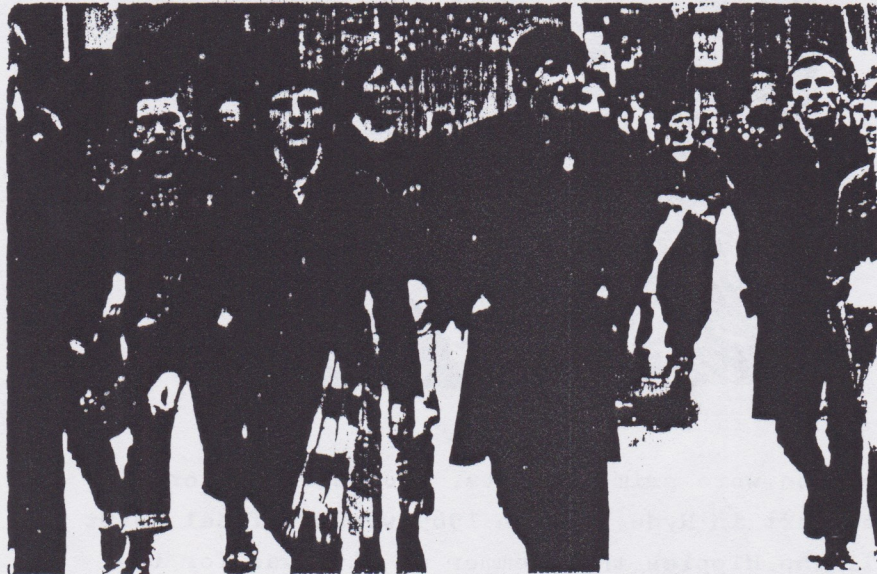


Slade were Skins from the Midlands. They dressed as their mates and audience did e.g. Skin Gear and played what they wanted to hear - 'Stomping Music'. But they did not become successful until after they dropped their Skinhead image.

The Skins and Reggae combination meant that the Skins were more or less alienated from Rock. Slade were the only band thrown up by the Skins, whereas the Mods had produced dozens - Who, Kinks, Small Faces etc.

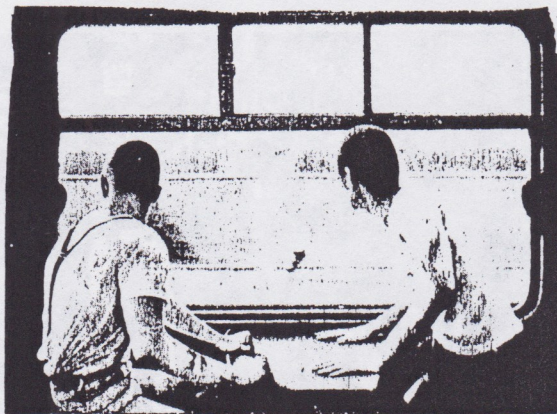
'AGGRO'

The Skinheads main passion however, was not music as it had been for the Mods with all their major fashion changes stemming from it. For the Skins Football was more important. Their passions were wrapped up in the game and it was almost obligatory for a Skinhead to show his allegiance by wearing the badge of the team he followed. The Skins 'support' for their teams was not just vocal, they were also into 'Aggro' at football. Great importance was laid on defending their 'end' or taking the opponents end, and there was war on the terraces every Saturday.



This intense local Patriotism was not confined to football but was taken down as far as street level. Nationwide there were gangs of Skins who gathered in their respective areas for the specific purpose of defending their territory. Should any rival gang stray into another gangs area they would find themselves in trouble. These mini-wars which lasted for over a year or more were total. Most of the 'Skins' fights were at football or with rival packs of Skinheads. In certain areas however, various minorities were picked on by the Skins. Skins hunted in packs picking on a minority which they could afford to attack without risking injury in return.

The growing liason between West Indian and English youths which had been a reason for the success of reggae with the Skins also meant that in many Skinhead gangs there were black kids who were usually prime movers in the activities of the gang. Racism was channelled towards the Pakistani population who unlike the West Indians did not intergrate with the whites. Instead thny kept themselves in their own areas. These areas were targets for Skins who went 'Paki bashing'.



Hippies too were prime targets. The Rolling Stones free concert in Hyde Park in 1969 was the focal point for all the Hippies that summer as it was for the Skins who joined forces and went there in an attempt to disrupt it.

In areas where there were few or no immigrants the Skins found other scapegoates such as 'Squaddies', 'Tourists', 'Queers' etc, who they could pick on.

The Skins gathered in large numbers not only for football but to go to the Coast on Bank holidays for the ritual fighting as the Mods had done.

Suedeheads

Suedeheads were the natural progression for the Skinheads. The Skinhead cult had emerged in '68 reaching its peak in the summer of '69. By the winter of '70 the Skins were switching from Jeans, boots and braces to the smoother Crombie overcoats and trevira suits though there were still remnants of the old style.

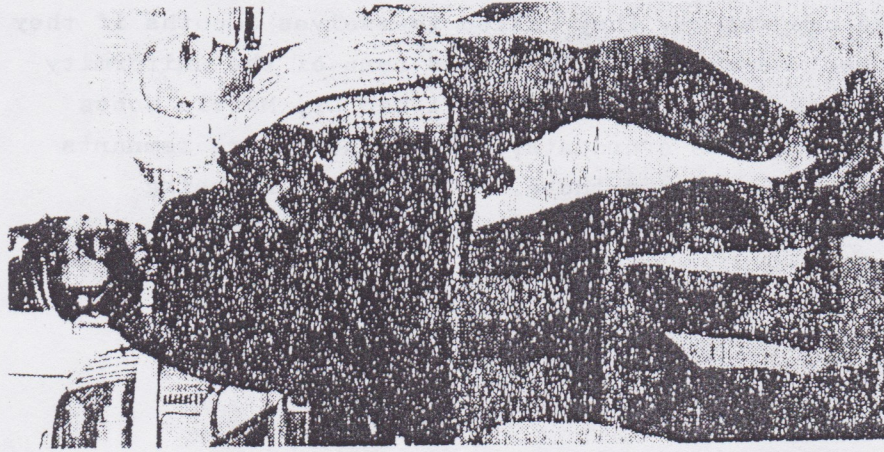
The haircut too was smoother, still short but not cropped. Again it was the haircut that was to provide the name for the look 'Suedeheads'.

'Johnny Reggae' a record by the Piglets (masterminded by Jonathan King) released in 1971 was pure 'popcorn reggae'. The song however, was based by King on someone he had seen in a dance hall and its references to 'Fringe and buckle stompers' and 'two-tone tonic brides' identify 'Johnny' as a Suedehead.

The Suedehead movement was to give way to Smooths. The term Smooth was derived from the smoother hair and more colourful clothes compared with the drabness of the Skins.

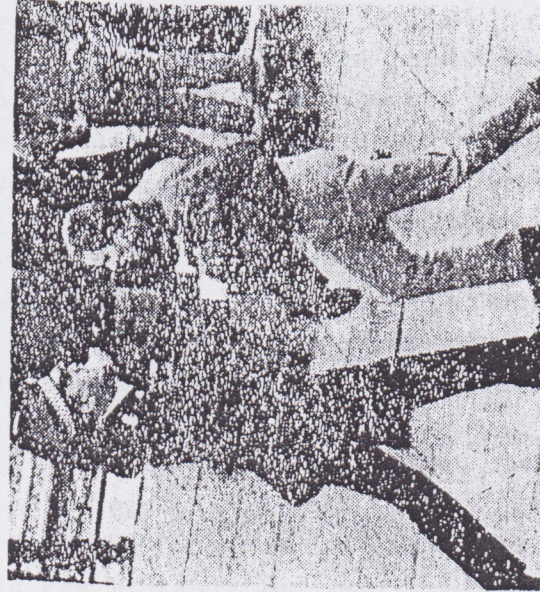
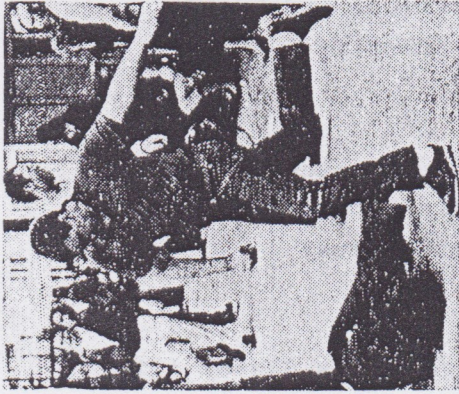
Extract from the 'Glory Game'.

The author describing Spurs fans Season '71-2 "As a species they used to be called Skinheads, and still are by the Press, but that term was already about a year out of date. Almost all of them had long hair and many could have passed for hippies, except for their big heavy boots. The average age was 15. They called themselves Smooths if they called themselves anything. There was none of the uniformity of the previous season, when they all had Dr. Martin boots and dark blue crombie overcoats, though there were remnants of the old style here and there. They don't like being mistaken for Hippies a breed they consider filthy".



New Society 26 June 1980

Football fans discovered a style. I remember 4,000 Manchester United Skinheads on the terraces at Elland Road in Leeds in 1968. They all wore bleached Levis, Dr Martens, a short scarf tied cravat-style,



cropped hair. They looked like an army and, after the game, went into action like one.



The Skinhead Revival

The reemergence of Skinheads was mainly a reaction against what had happened to punk. Punk had been a working class movement and anti-fashion. By '77 it had become commercial, acceptable and fashionable. Dissillusioned punks turned to the Skinhead look which was purer and almost exclusively working class. It was also not commercial. It was not until the Mod revival that clothes such as sta-pres, tonics and Ben Shermans were brought back on the market. The Skin revival also attracted kids who had not been Punks but bootboy types whose main passion had been football not music. The new Skins followed hard core punk bands and revived not only the look but the behaviour of the original Skins. Skrewdriver a Punk band from Blackpool adopted the Skinhead look and gained a following. Cocksparrer was another group adopted by the Skins. But it was Sham 69, one of the second wave of Punk bands inspired by the Pistols and the Clash, that was to become the focal point for the new Skins. The Skins had read in an interview that Sham's vocalist Jimmy Pursey used to be a Skinhead and they latched onto his group.



"If punks are about anarchy then Skinheads are the most anarchist going" Jimmy Pursey.

Tonics, sta-pres, striped 'tank-tops' and heavy shoes was the new style of dress but gradually there was less uniformity in the style of dress and Skins, Suedes and Smoothies were to disappear from the scene.

Though Skinheads never really disappeared from the football terraces the clothes like the music went out of fashion. It was not until 1977 that a new generation of Skins was to emerge with the clothes, music and behaviour all revived.



Sham 69 and the new Skins came to prominence together. The bands success swelled the ranks of the Skins who were gaining a growing notority as the 'Sham Army'.

By the summer of '78 the Skinheads were back in full swing and though they followed Punk bands they still placed great importance on the reggae of the kind favoured by the original Skins as they did football.

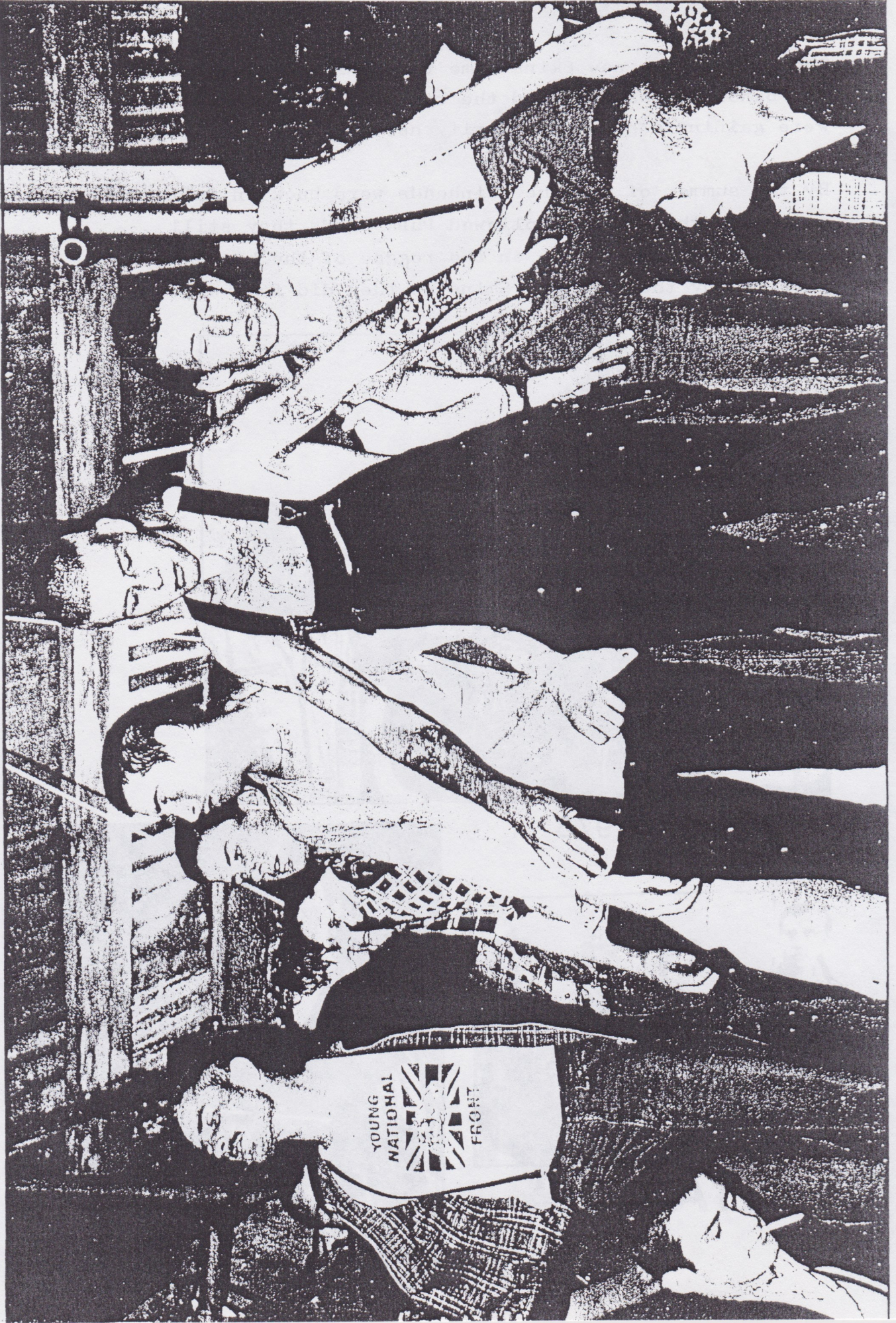


READING 1978



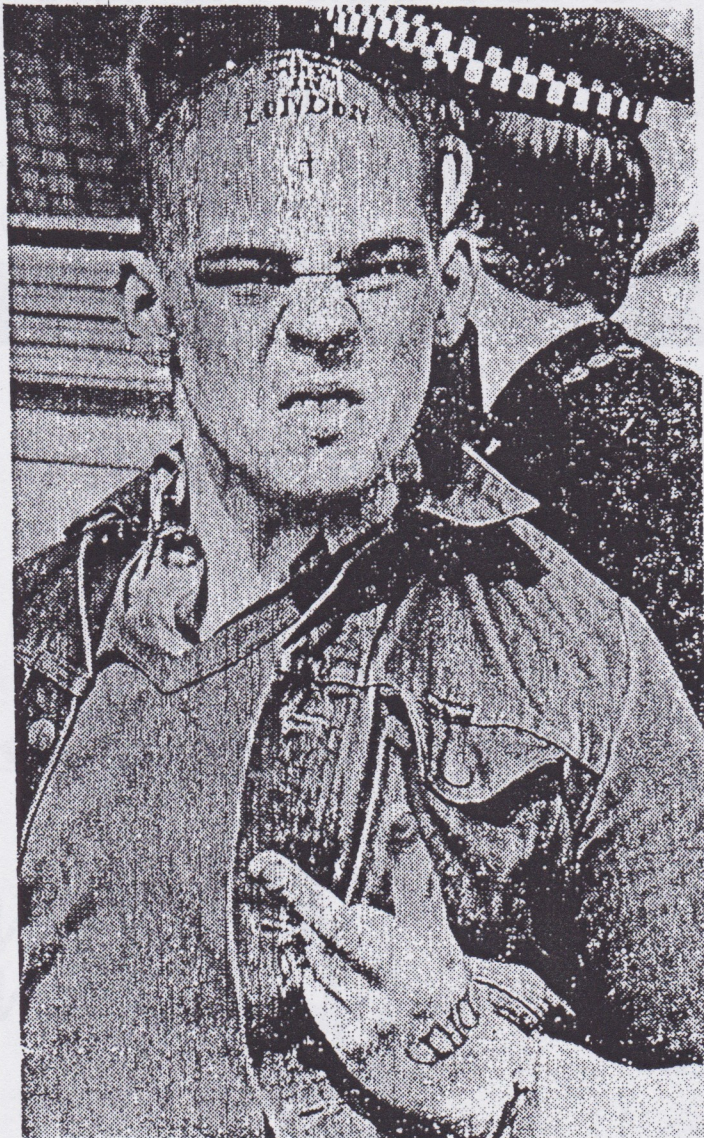
SHAM 69





Above: Sham 69 fans at the Reading Festival

It was Skinheads that formed the majority of the fans of the Ska bands. The Specials and Madness at the start of their rise to prominence. The success of the bands has again boosted the ranks of the Skinheads. Though Skins still follow Punk bands they now have bands which play 'their music' Ska, to follow as well. And so after 10 years the dancehalls are once again filled with Skinheads dancing to Reggae and 'Liquidator' Harry J's reggae instrumental from '69 is punctuated with the cries 'Skinheads are back.'



For some kids it is just a fashion. It is being different, an alternative to other styles, for others it is a way of life.

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